

Q THE Quarterly

I Had To Choose What I Could Not Live Without

When Nicole and Chuck met, as children, they were drawn to each other, magnetically. He, with his sideways smile. She, always looking over her shoulder. They got each other. They had a connection that went beyond understanding.

As they grew older, whenever they entered each other's homes, they knew to expect the unexpected. They were all too familiar with each other's chaos. His mother was addicted. Her mother drank way too much. Nicole and Chuck each sensed destruction ahead. And they found solace in each other's understanding. If they needed to talk, they knew where to find each other. When there were no words, they allowed each other's silence. "We felt like we only had each other," she recalled.

They knew their paths would continue to merge, as long as they could.

That was until Chuck turned 37, when he died from an overdose.

Nicole fell into a tailspin. She thought she had more time to help him. Why, why, why? He left her with so many questions. And she got lost inside of



When Nicole held Valentina, she knew that having a purpose can change everything.

them. Buried inside her questions, she wondered, What could possibly be so enticing about heroin that he would give everything up for it?

In her despair, she decided the only way to find out was to try heroin herself.

That's how Nicole Tenuto lost herself.

She found out how heroin could take her to a place where she didn't feel the pain

In this issue, you will read about some inspiring ways our dedicated employees and volunteers are helping to change lives.

1 Nicole knew as soon as she held Valentina in her arms that she had a huge decision to make.

2 Tony and Amy D'Orazio grow the highest quality food and donate it to people living in poverty.

7 Share My Meals is trying to recover every meal that is available to share with someone in need.

8 For her birthday, Liz Corkran asked her friends to bring clothes for people who are homeless.

anymore. It was like an escape hatch. "Like I was floating above it all," she said. At first, Nicole welcomed that feeling.

"I don't want to glamorize that,"

"I was at a point where I had to choose: What can I live without? And I knew I could not live without my daughter."

she quickly said. "Because things got out of control real fast. I used to have my own house, a good job, and my



Tony and Amy D'Orazio had a vision of producing the highest quality food – and giving it away to those in need.

Organic Farm Donates Restaurant Quality Food To The Mission

Just over a decade ago, Stephanie Delucia, who was heading up the marketing department for Vertical Screen, an international information technology firm, recalled how Tony and Amy D'Orazio, the entrepreneurial husband-and-wife team, came into her office, closed the door, and said, "We need to talk."

Stephanie gulped as she heard that ominous phrase. Then she saw that Tony and Amy's smiles were conveying a completely different message.

Amy simply said, "We bought a farm."

"That's cool," Stephanie responded, though she was still unsure why they chose to tell her in such a private way.

Tony explained, "We want you to work on the farm."

Stephanie just laughed, saying, "Tony, I kill houseplants."

"Oh, I know that," he beamed, having worked with her for seven years. "We want you to be our first employee, and to oversee the administrative and organizational aspects of the farm."

Then Amy and Tony exuberantly

"When someone comes to The Mission, the first thing we ask is, 'Are you hungry?' Then over a warm meal, we get to know them, and discover how we can be most helpful."

shared their vision of producing the highest quality food - and giving it away.

As Tony said, "We are going to grow the type of food that is served in the best restaurants in the world, and do-

nate it to people who are hungry and living in poverty."

He added, "People who are struggling, who can't make ends meet, have an untold amount of stress in their lives. They are hurting in so many ways. But that does not mean they should have to go to bed hungry."

"We studied shelters, food pantries and soup kitchens," he said, "which all toil to manage donations. So, more often than not, they have to use whatever small budgets they have on lowest-priced and lowest-quality food."

"That is where we are going to make a difference. Everyone deserves high quality food. Philosophically, this is about respecting everyone's dignity, regardless of what they are currently going through."

Stephanie knew that Tony and Amy had been involved in donating financially and were board members of several nonprofits in the Philadelphia area where they grew up.

"What we feel is important now," Tony said, "is to take direct action, and have a more profound impact on alleviating hunger."

Without having to think twice, Stephanie told Tony and Amy, "I'm in." She added, "I loved the idea of how important this was, and how we would make a difference."

From there, the nonprofit, known as Carversville Farm Foundation, had its first employee.

While generations of farmers were concluding that small and medium-sized farms were not sustainable, Amy and Tony decided that it was their time to become farmers. "Out of a dollar used to purchase food from a farm," Tony explained, "four cents goes to the farmer. It is a very challenging place to make a profit. And you cannot do everything efficiently, which is why most farmers specialize in one crop." Instead of running it like a business, he explained, "We chose



When Tony and Amy asked Stephanie Delucia to be the first employee on the farm, she laughed and said, "I kill houseplants."

to feed people." Sustained mostly by Amy and Tony, at this point, the foundation spends about two million dollars per year to run the farm.

"It is outrageous in any country, let alone ours, that someone can go hungry."

"I didn't know the first thing about farms. But I loved them. I grew up in South Philly, and our backyard was about this big," Tony said, pointing to a large table in the middle of the room. "What I do know is how to see a need, how to recognize talent, how to run complex organizations, and how to bring people together," he added. Most importantly, he knows how to make things happen.

They started by buying most of the 388 acres of land they now own in a rustic part of Bucks County. Then, they spent three years replenishing the soil. "Unfortunately," Tony explained, "most European farming methods - including herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, etcetera - abuse the land. So we had to grow topsoil to give the land back its proper nutrients. Only then could we start growing vegetables."

Now, in every direction you look, the farm is full of colors, life and energy. In one field, hens lay more than 2,500 organic eggs a day in their high-end mobile chicken houses. "Eggs are a per-

fect source of protein," Tony reminded. In another field, herds of Angus cattle are grazing. Bourbon Red turkeys mill around separately. And rows upon rows of organic vegetables reach up to the sky.

The farm thrives on the support of volunteers, as well as 12 permanent staff and 7 seasonal workers.

And since partnering with The Mission in April, we have been fortunate and grateful to receive over 20,000 pounds of certified organic vegetables and pasture-raised meat and eggs. More specifically, the foundation has donated 3,982 pounds of chicken, 3,945 dozen eggs, 2,132 pounds of beef, 1,972 pounds of turkey, 313 pounds of Stewing Hens, and 7,978 pounds of vegetables.

The Mission's Chef Dave Jawidzik said, "The high quality of this food is astounding. So many people notice it, appreciate it, and compliment us on

"I love going to The Mission where I see people who are being helped. It reminds me of why we are doing this."

how delicious the meals are. And, with such tasty raw ingredients, we have become more creative in the meals we are preparing."

Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission, added, "When someone comes to The Mission, the first thing we ask is, 'Are you hungry?' Then over a warm meal, we get to know them, and discover how we can be most helpful. Serving a delicious meal helps to create trust - especially for someone who is hungry and may have lost all hope. That first meal is the entry point to all the other social services we can provide - including a hot shower, a change of clothes, a safe place to sleep, a locker for their belongings, access to medical care, counseling, vocational development, and the possibility of



Jacque Behrends, Poultry Assistant Manager, prepares at least 150 dozen free-range eggs every day to go through a washing machine, checking first with a light to detect cracks, before they are packed for delivery.

finding their own home."

"It is outrageous in any country, let alone ours, that someone can go hungry," said Tony. "That's why we are doing what we are doing. Farming is hard work. Very hard work. And whenever I get tired," he mused, "or need to have my inspiration lifted, I love going to The Mission where I see people who are being helped. It reminds me of why we are doing this."



On this organic farm, seasonal workers prepare to place netting around napa cabbage, rather than spraying with insecticides.

I Had To Choose What I Could Not Live Without

continued from page 1

kids. I lost it all. And I lost myself. I became homeless, and I was living on the streets of Camden, which is a very dangerous

“The inside is where Nicole has been working, learning about her grit, patience, belief in herself, trust of others, and how having a purpose can change everything.”

place. I’m lucky I made it out alive. I rubbed shoulders with death so many times. Dealing to support my habit, I was regularly in the crossfire of shootings. Once I was sitting next to someone who was shot and killed. I can’t tell you how many overdoses I saw. I had a warrant, so I was constantly trying to avoid the police. After a while, it becomes some kind of strange normal. It doesn’t faze you, because the drugs numb you. That was my life for five years.”

Then she became pregnant.

“I was at a point where I had to choose: What can I live without? And I knew I could not live without my daughter. So, I had to live without drugs,” Nicole reflected.

She went through detox, then a residential treatment program, while knowing that the New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency would take her daughter after she was born to live with a Resource Family, who would provide care and could play a supportive role in reunification.

Meanwhile, Nicole reached out to Thomasine Gaines at For My Baby and Me, an innovative program in which the Rescue Mission of Trenton has partnered with Capital Health, HomeFront, Catholic Charities and Trenton Health Team to provide long-term recovery as well as

ongoing medical care, counseling and support for women who are struggling with addiction and for their children.

Nicole said that Thomasine, who has lived experience in overcoming poverty and addiction, “first helped by talking me through the emotions I was feeling. Then she assured me by saying, ‘I was there. You are going to get through this. It is going to be very challenging. I will be there with you, though, every step of the way.’ Then she prepared me for what would be coming next.”

Thomasine, a certified peer recovery specialist at The Mission, shared, “I have a deep hole in my arm from shooting heroin. It is an insidious drug that will capture you. So, I come from a place of knowing. And of understanding. And the women know that I am there for one reason – to help them and their baby. I tell them, Wherever you go, you’re still going to take you with you. You don’t live outside. You live inside. So, that’s where you have to work. On the inside.”

The inside is where Nicole has been working, learning about her grit, patience, belief in herself, trust of others, and how having a purpose can change everything. She prevailed through the understandably demanding and lengthy process of weekly supervised visits with her daughter becoming unsupervised; then overnight visits extended to weekends; to, at last, being granted custody of her daughter Valentina.

In July, Nicole started working at



Thomasine told Nicole: “It is going to be challenging. I will be there with you, though, every step of the way.”

The Mission, where she is a member of The Mission’s Outreach Project, traveling to places where people struggling with addiction are known to congregate. She and her colleagues offer everyone they meet a cup of coffee, something to eat, a caring conversation, a deep level of trust – and, if the individual is ready, medication to help with recovery, access to healthcare, and shelter from their personal storms.

“What I am doing now feels like a purpose,” she said. “I understand where someone who is struggling with addiction is coming from. It makes it easier for them to open up to me – because I’ve been through it. And I’m here to let someone who is struggling know that if recovery can happen to me, it can happen to you.”

Meanwhile, Nicole and Valentina are temporarily staying at HomeFront, while Nicole has been looking for affordable housing, and a car. “I have a car, but the transmission is going, along with other parts. For now, I’m very grateful that Thomasine has offered to drive me back and forth to Recovery Court each week,” she said. “I’ve gone through the hardest part now, which is getting my daughter back. I’m sure the rest will somehow work out.”

Going To Bed With Our Stomachs Stuck To Our Backs

When Orlando Rivera was eight years old, one of his neighbors on Linden Street, near the Campbell Soup

factory in Camden, was putting up a fence. So, Orlando asked if he could have some extra wood. The neighbor smiled, then asked, "What do you want to do with it?" Orlando responded, "I want to make a shoeshine box." The neighbor's smile widened, as he said, "OK. So long as you give me a free shoeshine after you make the box."

With his new shoeshine box, some polish, rags, and a sign declaring, "Shoeshine – 50 Cents," Orlando learned how to make money. As the workers changed shifts at the Campbell Soup factory, he would greet them. "Some of the guys would even pay me a dollar," he recalled. "Even if they didn't need a shoeshine."

"I knew my mom needed money," he explained. "My dad was there, but he wasn't really there. So, my two sisters and I would go to bed with our stomachs stuck to our backs. The kids would tease us at school because my sisters and me were wearing the same clothes over and over. That's why I started hustling. I figured I had to do something."

Then, when he was nine years old, Orlando branched out to selling newspapers. "I'd work from 3:00 until 5:30 doing that, and get \$8 a week."

He and his sisters were no longer hungry, he said, and we finally could buy some nice clothes.

Recognizing his ambition, when he turned ten, a neighbor bought Orlando a bike and had him deliver packages to different places throughout the city. Then he said he was making over \$100 a week. Each of those neatly wrapped packages contained marijuana. A few years later, they contained heroin.

"I felt like I was not doing something wrong," he explained. "I was just doing for my family what my dad should be doing."



When Orlando was eight years old, he built a shoeshine box and started making 50 cents a shine.

At 16, Orlando said, "I bought a brand new, white and shiny 1976 Grand Torino – with that long, beautiful front."

When he was in 11th grade, he said, "I got my sweetheart pregnant. We got married and I bought a house in Cam-

"Addiction is a thief. It robs you of your life. And it tears apart anyone who loves you."

den." By that time, he was selling drugs on his own.

A few years later, he bought his mother a house in Camden. But she said to him, "I don't want that. I want you to be alive."

He added, "My mother used to pray to God in Spanish, saying, 'Cuida de mi hijo, de lo que sea que este hacienda.' Then she would repeat in English, 'Take care of my son, whatever he is doing.'

Another time, she said, 'You stole from me.' He said, 'When did I ever do that?' She responded, 'Whenever the

phone rang, I was afraid it was someone saying you were dead.' You stole my peace of mind is what she was saying," he explained.

Along the way, Orlando was shot in the head by another drug dealer. "But that didn't stop me," he said, matter-of-factly. He considered it just an occupational hazard. Fast forward, and less than a decade later, Orlando was locked up in Rahway, serving 16 years.

When he got out in 2002, as he said, "I was a mess. I was using, living in abandoned houses, eating out of trash cans. I was gutted out. I knew I could do better, but I didn't know how. I had lost my way. I used to say, 'God, please get me locked up again. Or take me out of this world.'"

Three years later, he came to The Mission for the first time. "Back then, Mary Gay ran the place with Fernie Gaines (the Director of Support Services). I learned a lot about myself by going through the recovery program here," Orlando said. "I got back on my feet. And they helped me get a job at

Going To Bed With Our Stomachs Stuck To Our Backs

continued from page 5

Certified Steel. I was in touch with my three daughters, one who is now a doctor, the other two are nurses. But then I slipped up, and I went downhill again. Fast."

He paused, then added, "Addiction is a thief. It robs you of your life. And it tears apart anyone who loves you."

It took several years for Orlando to be ready to come back to The Mission. In February of this year, he began a transition program called Another Chance, where the Department of Community Affairs in cooperation with the New Jersey Parole Board provides funding for 180 days of housing for someone who would otherwise be homeless.

In The Shelter, Orlando received medications to reduce his substance cravings and prevent relapse, in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies to help him see new possibilities within himself.

He is now reconnecting with that part of himself who, when he was eight years old, saw a way out by making a shoeshine box.

Alyese Patterson, a Case Manager in The Shelter, said, "You can tell there has been a major shift deep within him." She describes Orlando as very resourceful

and hard working, adding, "Shortly after getting here, he asked if he could help. He started sweeping and mopping floors, then cleaning bathrooms, unclogging sinks, and is now spackling, painting and putting up sheetrock. He didn't care what it was. He just wanted to help."

He also volunteered to openly share the humiliation he felt while being homeless at a symposium sponsored by the New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness on April 22nd, the day the Supreme Court started hearing a case that would decide

"I know this is my last chance. So, I'm grabbing it. With all I have."

whether homelessness can be criminalized.

"I've been just trying to give back in some small way," Orlando said. "Alyese has been so encouraging to me. She's helped me to stay on the right track."



Orlando was offered a part-time position in the maintenance department at The Mission.

He added, "I am just so thankful." Then, as if he could hear a clock ticking in the background, he said, "I'm not getting any younger. I know, this is my last chance. So, I'm grabbing it. With all I have."

Orlando has just moved into his own apartment in West Trenton. "I cherish having this roof over my head," he said. "It is a fresh start." And in light of his diligence, focus, and newfound belief in himself, he was offered, and gratefully accepted, a part-time position in the maintenance department at The Mission. "This is where I want to make a difference, to make life just a little better"

The Need Remains Undeniable For Our Food Pantry

On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from 9:00 am until 2:00 pm, Arly Uz-Barragan, Coordinator of The Mission's Food Pantry, warmly greets each patron, sometimes in Spanish, other times in English.

"While the children all make me smile," Arly reflected, "still, it is hard, knowing that the need for food is so strong. We have so many regulars. And a lot of new people are depending upon us."

The harsh reality is that nearly one

out of every two children under the age of 6 in Trenton is living below the poverty line.

Since we opened our Food Pantry three years ago 6,048 individual family members have received nutritious food.

And that number continues to grow.

We don't know if the growing number of patrons means we will need to extend our hours or expand our space.

All we know is, with your help, we will be here.



"Muchas gracias," Josselyn said, as she waited her turn to enter our Food Pantry, rocking her son Junior.

Sharing Meals With Those Who Have Not

While volunteering at a local food pantry, Isabelle Lambotte and some of her friends were deeply moved by the daunting challenges they saw so many of their neighbors facing because they did not have enough money to prepare nutritious meals for their families.

Meanwhile, they could not help but notice that so many restaurants, cafeterias and food stores had surplus food that was not being used.

Putting those two disparate conditions together, four years ago, just before

“We are extremely grateful to receive these nutritionally balanced meals that are helping to feed so many people in need.”

the pandemic hit, Isabelle and her friends created a solution that became known as Share My Meals – with the vision of helping to create a world where everyone has access to healthy food and no food goes to waste.

Partnering with corporate cafeterias, university eating clubs, school cafeterias, farms, restaurants and other businesses, Isabelle and her friends attracted volunteers to pick up healthy meals and deliver them to nonprofit organizations helping people experiencing homelessness, as well as directly to families in need, including families who were struggling, in crisis, and elderly.

In October of 2022, Share My Meals partnered with The Mission, providing, on average, 300 meals a week of chicken, beef, vegetables, pasta, rice, potatoes and baked goods.

Hélène Lanctuit, CEO of Share My Meals, used to work at Nestle in Switzerland, where her expertise was in research



Hélène Lanctuit, CEO of Share My Meals, offered a nourishing meal to Arcoline Robinson, who has been staying at The Shelter, where he obtained employment at Trane, and is in the final stages of getting his own apartment through one of The Mission’s partnerships.

“What drew me to Share My Meals,” she said, “is the potential of recovering every meal that is available to share with someone who needs it. By scaling what we are doing, we can have an even more significant impact.”

and development, helping to reduce food and plastic waste. “What drew me to Share My Meals,” she said, “is the potential of recovering every meal that is available to share with someone who needs it. By scaling what we are doing, we can have an even more significant impact.”

In France, where she is from,

Hélène said, “It is forbidden for food suppliers to throw out food. It must be donated. That is just one example of how changing a law could help create awareness, and help so many more people.” She added that the Board of Share My Meals is seeking to create a coalition of like-minded individuals and organizations “to focus on expanding our collective thinking about how, together, we can eliminate hunger through meal recovery.”

Hélène added, “We estimate there are over five million surplus meals each year in New Jersey alone. Can you imagine the difference we can make together if food recovery becomes the norm?”

Meanwhile, Chef Dave Jawidzik said, “We are extremely grateful to receive these nutritionally balanced meals that are helping to feed so many people in need.”



Please
donate
now.

Feeding those who are hungry, housing those who are homeless, counseling those seeking recovery, and providing life-changing opportunities.

Ten-Year-Old Girl Focused Her Birthday On Helping Others

This summer, as Liz's tenth birthday neared, she told her mom she didn't want the focus to be on herself.

She still wanted to have a party and invite her friends. She just wanted the intention of her birthday to be about helping others in need.

"I don't want to receive any gifts this year," she explained, "Instead, I'd like everyone who comes to the party to bring clothes for kids whose parents can't afford to get them new clothes for school."

"I know there's just too many people in need," she added. "And I want to be able to help in some small way."

So in lieu of receiving gifts for herself, Liz Corkran, who is now a fifth grader at McGalliard Elementary School in Hamilton, coordinated a clothing

drive for The Mission.

The invitation for her party – which was held at Hamilton United Martial Arts Academy, where Liz is a senior blue belt in TaeKwonDo – read: Bring your presence, not presents.

When she saw all the coats, jackets, shoes, boots, dresses, blouses, pants and shirts that her friends brought to the party, and combined them with those she had brought as well, Liz said, "I felt warm inside, nice and kind, like I was doing something that could make a difference." Smiling, she added, "Then, when my mom and I gave the donations to The Mission, it felt ten times better."

Reflecting, she added, "It makes me feel bad knowing that someone

"Knowing that we helped someone who was struggling...there is no gift that could have topped that."

does not have enough clothes or that they go to bed hungry. Knowing that we helped someone who was struggling...there is no gift that could have topped that."

It took several SUVs to bring all the clothes to The Mission.



For her tenth birthday party, Liz asked her friends to bring gently-worn clothes they had outgrown to donate to The Mission.

What did her friends say about her unique request for her party? "They thought it was cool," she replied.

Were there any gifts that she wanted for herself this year? "I would have liked a pair of earrings. But this was more important." She paused, then added, "Much more important."